

M 793
The Successful Life.

A DISCOURSE,
ON THE DEATH
OF
PRESIDENT LINCOLN,

DELIVERED APRIL 19, 1865,

AT THE

CENTER CHURCH, BRATTLEBORO,

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. G. P. TYLER.

Published by Request.

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PRINTED AT THE VERMONT RECORD OFFICE.

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TEXT.

II. TIMOTHY, IV. VII. VIII. I HAVE FOUGHT A GOOD FIGHT; I HAVE FINISHED MY COURSE; I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH; AND HENCEFORTH THERE IS LAID UP FOR ME A CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH THE LORD THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE WILL GIVE ME IN THAT DAY, AND NOT TO ME ONLY, BUT TO ALL THEM WHO LOVE HIS APPEARING.

DISCOURSE.

THIS is not fictitious grief. The spontaneous abandonment of labor, the crowding of this sacred place, the solemnity on every countenance, mark not those who

“Feign decorous woe.”

The Lord has suffered a blow to fall directly upon the heart of each of us. When the President fell,—

“Then you, and I, and all of us fell down”

from the heights of our exultation and joy.

I think we can afford to forget—nay, our hearts bid us forget—for a while, our traffic and our cares, and muse, here, upon this great life now closed.

I need not say one word with the design to deepen in any mind the impression made by President LINCOLN’S death. All feel it to the full capacity of their several natures.

The event itself is so astounding, the crime so appalling, the development of what is possible for human nature to do such, that the nation feels the shock. To strive to deepen this impression would be at once useless and vain.

One thing I may and ought to attempt, and that is to turn this deep feeling to some good account.

Is not this manifestly what God wishes? I should not be true to Him who has permitted the deed to be done; I should not be true to my position as a preacher of the gospel of the Son of God, should I fail, at least, to attempt to do this much. And allow me to say that you ought not, and I believe do not, expect less than this.

Truly, "a prince and great man has fallen" by the hand of an assassin, in our land, who, so far as we can judge, was wholly, inexpressibly, a greater and a better man than he of whom, after his murder, the sweet Psalmist of Israel spoke these words.

I have selected, to guide our thoughts on this occasion, the words of another prince among men, whose own life was soon to be taken from him by the hand of violence. I have fought a good fight; I have kept the faith; and henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me in that day, and not to me only, but to all them also who love his appearing.

It seems to me, and doubtless to you all, even in a merely worldly point of view, if ever a man lived a successful life, that man was ABRAHAM LINCOLN. What do men seek in the world? Is it honor from their fellow men?—Who ever won more of it than he? Is it power?—He ruled one of the mightiest empires the world has known. Is it wealth?—The poor boy who had to borrow the first book he read, won independence; nay, the nation would gladly have laid untold treasures at his feet. Is it the love of all hearts, confidence, friendship?—The mourning nation attests that none ever won more of these than he.

There is an old saying, What man has done, man may do. Certainly, there is a possibility of this. There may be another Milton, another Shakspeare. But we hardly expect them among all coming men. George Washington has hitherto stood peerless, alone, unapproachable. Nothing had occurred to make us pronounce, doubtfully, the memorable words, *First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen*. But I think you will accord with me in saying, that, in the deep treasury of the nation's heart, he has now a compeer.

In the majestic march of Jehovah among the nations, when arise great emergencies, when great principles are at stake.

when events startling, fearful, terrible, even, occur, and others impend ; when States are shaken to their foundations, and men's hearts fail them for dread of what may come, and the possibilities of evil loom up dark all around the horizon, and all things betoken to the calmest mind the existence of a great historic hour—an hour on which historians shall dwell long, and from which the philosopher shall draw lessons of wisdom for the ages—then, for that hour, the great Disposer of Events raises up—A MAN. When he does this, where does he look for him ? Not where men are wont to look for him ; not among crowned heads ; not among brilliant orators ; not even among renowned statesmen and jurists. The oak which is to rear its majestic head, a mark for all eyes, whose sturdy trunk shall stand unmoved in the storm, and whose strong branches shall spread a shelter, broad and dense, from the fierce heart-heats of the hour, he has been nurturing the while in comparative seclusion and obscurity. David was such a man, and he took him from the sheep cote. Martin Luther was such a man, and he took him from the cell of an obscure monk. Cromwell was such a man, and he took him from the house of a brewer.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN was such a man. The son of a poor man, reared in poverty, and when God sent him to his great task, only enough known to secure the place where he could show himself to be, what the Deity designed, *the man for the hour*.

If you will recall those uncertain, troublous and gloomy days when he did come, we hoped rather than felt assured that he was the man of whom all hearts felt the need. If I may be allowed the expression, there was something God-like in the very slowness with which he came up to the full height of the great occasion. Ridiculed for his homeliness and awkwardness, he put his detractors to shame and made them confess

“The man's a man for a' that.”

Honest, self-forgetful, surrounded by artful, traitorous men whom his weak predecessor suffered to throng the capital, and even the offices of state ; unused to governing ; new and startling events constantly occurring, demanding instant action, with never a precedent to guide him, was ever a man so sorely tried ? Unfit generals in the field, quarreling among themselves over their own petty ambition and rivalries ; uncertain how far the country would sustain him ; compelled to remove one general after another, with hosts of followers who pinned their faith on them ; compelled, at times, to see elections—as in the important State of New-York—go against him ; a political party, at the North, rising up in favor of the slave-power, whom he must have felt to be unutterably greater enemies to his country, and meaner, too, than the rebels who fought for an institution they had grown up under ; molested and provoked, almost beyond bearing—quite beyond ours—by the calumnies and undisguised hostility of foreign powers ; yet, you will bear me out in saying, equal to every emergency ; almost always, if not ever, the cool master of the situation ; so winning the confidence, reverence, and love of all loyal men, that he was borne in a triumph greater, more complete, than was ever known before, again, into the first office in the gift of the people—not in a time of peace, but when it was no fiction, no mere flourish of rhetoric to say, *the people knew they were intrusting to his keeping their lives, their liberties, and their sacred honor*. Yes, gladly did we take up all these, and confidently did we lay them, with our fortunes, also, in his honest hands.

Since writing thus far, a paper was laid on my table, containing the following testimonial to President LINCOLN, from the pen of the editor of the *New-York World*, whose relations to President LINCOLN are matters of history, and quite relieve him from the imputation of being a too partial judge. Allow me to read it as a testimony won by distinguished worth from a political opponent :

“ Of the career brought thus suddenly to this tragic close, it is yet too early to make any estimate that will not require revision. It is probable that the judgment of history will differ in many respects from that of Mr. LINCOLN’S cotemporaries ; and in no respect, perhaps, more than in reversing the current tenor of the public thinking on what has been considered the vacillation of his character. It must never be overlooked that Mr. LINCOLN was elevated to the Presidency without previous training ; that he was a novice in the discharge of high executive functions. Confronted at the very threshold with problems of a novelty, magnitude and difficulty, which would have caused the most experienced statesman to quail, beset on all sides by the most conflicting advice, it would not have been wisdom, but shallow and foolhardy presumption, indicating unseemly levity of character, if he had affected a display of the same kind of confident decision with which an old sailor manages a cock-boat in fair weather. If, under such circumstances, he had played the role of a man of decision, he would have forfeited all title to be considered a man of sense. When the most experienced and reputable statesmen of the country came to opposite conclusions, it is creditable to the strength, solidity, and modesty of Mr. LINCOLN’S mind, that he acted with a cautious and hesitating deliberation proportioned rather to a sense of his great responsibilities than to a theatrical notion of political stage effect.

“ Had the country, previous to Mr. LINCOLN’S first election, foreseen what was coming, it would not have chosen for President a man of Mr. LINCOLN’S inexperience and peculiar type of character. But if his party was to succeed, we doubt whether foresight and deliberation would have made so good a choice.”

We say, therefore, even in this earthly and merely worldly sense, thy life, O, Friend, Patriot, Pilot through the storm, President, Emancipator of millions, was a success. In regard to these things, how correctly might he have said, having achieved so much, having conquered so many foes and difficulties, *I have fought a good fight.*

It is not claimed for President LINCOLN that his course, in all things, met with the approval of all loyal men. That were

an impossibility. But it is claimed that God has set forth, for an example to statesmen, to all public men, in an age needing it, a resplendent instance of the highest style of success following a pure, honest, unselfish, upright public life. It is a lesson to be learned, pondered well, and never forgotten, especially by all young men who crowd this house to-day, and who will live to influence and perhaps to sway the destinies of this nation, when we, whose heads are gray, appear no more. It is a lesson which can not fail to prove a great and lasting public good.

But is this all which we recall—which we are permitted to recall—in the hour of our heavy regret, for our comfort and for profit, in his illustrious example?

Is this all which can be said of him to prove him a good, a great, a wise man—the man for the hour?

No, my hearers! Bear with me while I take another view of his character. When Moses came down from Sinai with the Law, written by the finger of God, it was on two tables of stone. One of them contained the duties we owe to God, the other the duties we owe to men.

President LINCOLN recognized this distinction. When he had aimed honestly to do his duty to men, he did not believe that he had, in doing that, fulfilled his obligation to God. The first table may be almost entirely disregarded, and the latter kept, as by a young ruler in the time of Christ.

I know there is a sickly sentimentality expressed in these lines of the poet:

“And were not sinful Mary’s tears
An offering worthy heaven?”

I reply, No, no! Nowhere in the Bible is it so written. No tears, never so many or bitter, can take the place of obedience to the first table. And more: No man can find, within all these sacred pages, any amount of human suffering, or self-sacrifice, no giving up of life for friend, or country worth

enough to redeem a soul from the consequences of neglect of the First Table of the Law. President LINCOLN acknowledged this, and he put his trust in the Redeemer of men. He said, "I was not a Christian, but now I love Jesus."

We do not know now—perhaps we may never know—the precise process of his thinking, which brought him to this conclusion. Perhaps the constant and compelled contemplation of the outbreaking evil in men, affected him. It could hardly fail to be otherwise, for how much of it he saw! He was obliged to fight it all around, and all the while. Besides the ever present distress of wounds and diseases which necessarily accompany a conflict like ours, before his mind's eye, must have often passed the long lines of patriot prisoners, gaunt and pallid with starvation, caused by the fiendish malice of men. He must have often thought of the multitudes of men, women and little ones, doomed to bear a life-long sorrow to the grave, over friends who must be numbered among the needless dead, who perished for want of a little care, a little bread, a little shelter from the cold or heat. He saw this evil, saw it persisted in, gloried in, by many. Every day he contended with men who, who, for the bad object of enslaving the blacks, were ready to sacrifice any number of the whites. Day by day he saw in these rebel leaders, readily supported by multitudes of kindred spirit, falsehood the most foul, knavery the most unblushing, cruelty the most unrelenting, making a chapter of history darker with crime than was ever before written by man.

It may well have led him to feel that human nature needs cleansing by the divine spirit. He became a daily and diligent student of the Bible, while oppressed with calls and cares so many and heavy, as have seldom, if ever, fallen to the lot of man to bear.

We know not the process of his thought, but he said the revelation of Christ came to him as he stood among the noble dead at Gettysburgh. Perhaps he thought how they had

poured out their blood for their country, and for him. How could he have failed to do this? In that sober hour, when the feeling for them, in his great kind heart, must have been something far more than admiration—when it must have been one of the profoundest gratitude—he thought of Jesus, whom holy writ declares tasted death for every man, and for him. Then and there he said he loved Jesus. Thus, when at length that awful power of evil was permitted, to accomplish the great, crowning act, of cruelty and of ignominy against him, and against us all, and cut him off, we can complete for him the sentence chosen for our text, in a far higher and more important sense. He has fought a good fight, he has finished his course, he has kept the faith, and henceforth there is laid up for him a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give him in that day.

It was under the influence of this religious character which he had gained, that he wrote his last inaugural address—one of the most remarkable productions, all things considered, ever given by a ruler of men to the world.

It was a time of triumph; but not one word of exultation appears in it. It was a time when some pride in his own successful conduct of affairs might have been pardoned; but there is nothing of it. It was a time of wide spread, general, national joy; but he expresses none. It was a time when success had so far blessed our efforts that the end of the war seemed only a question of time, and that brief; but while his hopes were high for the future, he ventured no prediction respecting it.

But as if the whole course of events, and his own reflections, had impressed the conviction upon his mind that God had controlled all, and would control all in the future, whatever man might plan or attempt, he uses this impressive language. Let him, though dead, speak to us:

“The Almighty has His own purposes—‘Woe unto the world because of offences, for it must needs be, that offences

come ; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.' If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of these offences, which, in the Providence of God, must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offences came, shall we discern therein any departure from those Divine attributes which the believers of a loving God ascribe to him? Fondly do we hope, reverently do we pray, that this scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God will that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondmen's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, still it must be said that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

It is no marvel that merely worldly minded men could not comprehend the state of mind which produced these remarkable words. It is no marvel that they jeered at it, and stigmatized it as a rather poor sermon. Nevertheless, it will occupy a lofty place among the state papers of the nation. How beautifully rounded out is this most noble life ! His sun went down while it was yet day, but

"In the full circle of his rays complete."

Thus God, for our profit, has exhibited, in the highest and most auspicious position, before a busy and to a great extent an unbelieving age, before men, who, though believers in theory, procrastinate reconciliation to God, and the acknowledgment of Him as the disposer of all events ; a man—the busiest of them all—more constantly and dreadfully harrassed than they all, working his way out into the gospel light, as his pastor at Washington expresses it, into an abiding, firm, immoveable faith in God.

Henceforth, let no man say he has no time for these things.

"The world is but the rugged road
Which leads us to the bright abode
Of peace above.
So let us choose the narrow way,
Which leads no traveler astray
From realms above."

But ABRAHAM LINCOLN is gone from earth. He has left the great battle-field. He has fallen with the tens of thousands of our patriot slain—fallen, like them, by the weapons of the foes of freedom—fallen not without God. For we remember the words of the Master: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.” He is gone, and left us to struggle on through these troublous times. He is gone, and who does not feel himself to be personally bereaved? He is gone; but was there ever such a departure?

If it was said of Wilberforce that he went up to God with the shackles of eight hundred thousand slaves in his hands, ABRAHAM LINCOLN went up thither with the riven chains of millions.

Noble man! We will not say, we never shall look upon thy like again. We will not gaze timidly nor untrustingly into the future. We will rather hope that thy illustrious example shall remain such a power in our beloved land, that others may be found, in other great emergencies, which we have no reason to suppose will not come, to have caught thy mantle as it fell, and prove, under the lofty inspiration of thy example, able to go and do likewise, so far as may be possible in the ever varying circumstances of this stormy and unstable world.

“His soul to Him who gave it rose,
God led it to his long repose,
Its glorious rest;
And though the statesman’s sun has set,
Its light shall linger round us yet,
Bright, radiant, blest.”

Sept 30-8